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DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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DRAMA

VOL 17

OCTOBER, MCMXXXVIII

NUMBER

 THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By Stephen Williams

THE London theatre season began early. By the middle of September a brave fleet of ships was precariously afloat on that profitable ocean. A few of them have already foundered; some because they were imperfectly finished by their builders (whom we may identify as the authors), some because they were inadequately furnished by their owners (whom we may identify as the backers and producers), and some because their stores were early eaten by the rats (whom every manager will identify without a moment's hesitation as the dramatic critics).

It can be said at once that the most distinctive plays produced in the past few weeks are Charles Morgan's "The Flashing Stream" (Lyric), Hilda Vaughan's "She Too Was Young" (Wyndham's), Dodie Smith's "Dear Octopus" (Queen's) and Shakespeare's "Henry V" (Drury Lane). On a more modest plane we have Emile Zola's "Thou Shalt Not —" (Playhouse) and James Bridie's "Tobias and the Angel" (St. Martin's). These two are chiefly remarkable for two outstanding performances: Miss Nancy Price as the stricken mother in Zola and Mr. Robert Eddison as Tobias's Angel.

Everyone who has read Mr. Morgan's novels will readily guess what manner of play "The Flashing Stream" is, and will either go or stay away, according to what manner of man *he* is. The play has the clear vision and pure magic of Mr. Morgan's best work: a study of that sacred, single-minded passion — be it for love, for science or for art — without which humanity is dust and ashes. It is produced with taste and integrity and acted with a noble fire worthy of its theme —

particularly by Mr. Godfrey Tearle and Miss Margaret Rawlings.

When "She Too Was Young" was produced every critic rushed home to read his Jane Austen and make inevitable comparisons. A perfectly natural reaction: for this is a charming, decorously written study of pride and prejudice in a Welsh country family of the 'seventies, and the curious may trace many analogies between this and the Bennet household. The best performance is that of Miss Marie Ney as a matchmaking mother, determined at any cost to save her daughter from her own romantic mistakes. Mr. Edmund Gwenn as a lovable old recluse and Mr. Esme Percy as a detestable curled and scented dandy are both brilliant; but their parts are made for them, whereas Miss Ney has to help to make hers.

In "Dear Octopus" Miss Dodie Smith shows us Time and the Randolphs. The Randolphs are in four generations and are assembled for the golden wedding of great-grandfather and great-grandmother. Nothing very exciting happens, and the piece concerns itself chiefly with the interplay of diverse characters over a single week-end. One might call it Anglicised Tchekhov. Dame Marie Tempest gives us yet another sparkling study in the part of Dame Marie Tempest. Mr. John Gielgud, however, is not allowed to play Mr. John Gielgud, and has a hard task in bringing to life a rather flat part. My sharpest memories are of Miss Valerie Taylor and a group of grandchildren. How brilliant and perceptive are the child actors of to-day!

Henry V is probably one of the best-hated characters in Shakespeare. His coarse *bon-*

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

bomie, his mawkish buttonholing, so to speak, of the Almighty for the confederacy of providence in enterprises of profit, and his smug conviction that God is gratified by the enormous total of French corpses on the field of Agincourt, render him insufferable to all except those who remain schoolboys to the end of their days.

Yet at Drury Lane Mr. Ivor Novello and Mr. Lewis Casson—Mr. Novello with his nobly imaginative presentment of the king and Mr. Casson with his magnificent production of the play—almost persuade us that this was a great man fighting in a great cause.

Mr. Novello finds a splendid music in the heroic passages, and at other times moves our hearts with a gentle, reflective sincerity. He does not exult over spilt blood, and his prayer before battle is the meditation of a man alone with his conscience. We overhear rather than hear it. This king is Hamlet come to maturity. He can talk with men nor lose the kingly touch. The flashing rapier that was Prince Hal has not lost all its glitter with the years of responsibility. He can jest with his soldiers and can read their minds with that shrewd knowledge of human nature picked up long ago from a certain fat knight whose "great-belly-doublet" was stuffed with all the manifold humours of mankind. If "Henry V" is to be done at all, let it always be done thus!

Mr. Bernard Shaw is still the profoundest and liveliest mind in the theatre, and his "Geneva" was easily the profoundest and liveliest of the Malvern Festival plays. Second in order both of production and importance was Mr. J. B. Priestley's "Music at Night," showing the reactions of a number of people to the playing of a work for violin and piano. There are great moments in this play but they are dimmed now and then by muddled thinking and a faint artistic pretentiousness strange in a writer of such integrity.

"Tobias" is a legacy of the Open Air Theatre, where Mr. Sydney Carroll waged his gallant annual war with the weather. The main interest of the Regent's Park season, however, was in the first appearance in Shakespeare of Miss Gladys Cooper and Mr. Philip Merivale. Miss Cooper was occasionally uncertain of her words, but I should estimate that, on a nice computation, she spoke more of Shakespeare's lines during the season than of her own.

"Paprika," Mr. Eric Maschwitz's elaborate box of confectionery at His Majesty's, is at once of very slight and very vital importance to serious playgoers. It is of slight importance because by all ordinary standards of taste and culture this superabundant, super-fatted and completely superfluous entertainment belongs to the world of the super-cinema whose advertisers would no doubt describe it in such super-idiotic terms. It is of vital importance because it will fill every serious playgoer with savage indignation that, while good plays are hawked in vain round London, this piece of lavish nonsense can command (to quote Mr. James Agate) "the outlay of a sum large enough to endow with a permanent repertory theatre a town the size of Taunton or Kettering."

THE STANSTED PLAYERS.

Lord Bessborough's active interest in the amateur movement is so well known that it is not surprising to find that he is a practical enthusiast as well. Attached to his beautiful Hampshire home, Stansted Park, he has built a private theatre capable of seating 200 people, and here during the last eleven years the Society of Stansted Players—composed of friends and relatives and sometimes including Lord Bessborough himself—have created such a tradition for good acting and good plays that during productions the "House Full" notices are almost on permanent display.

This year's summer production was Sheridan's "School for Scandal" instead of the customary Shakespearean play, and it was no doubt with some diffidence that the actors prepared to foist the humours and conceits of the eighteenth century upon those faithful and rustic back-benchers who crowd in regularly from the neighbouring villages. But the adipose verbosity of Lady Susan Birch's Mrs. Candour and the testy dryness of Ralph Anderson's Sir Peter soon established friendly relations, and as the play gathered momentum, back as well as front were swept into the swirl of this sophisticated frolic. Much was no doubt due to the brilliant production of Robert Speaight—who in addition spoke the Prologue as David Garrick. The actors wore their airs and graces with as easy an elegance as their costumes. The "discovery" scene was extremely well contrived, Miss Anne Somerset adding a touch of pathos to a hitherto vivacious portrait of Lady Teazle. The ancestors, however, were knocked down with a competence more formal than funny in spite of a very comic Moses, and the masculine abandon of Charles Surface's bachelor apartments lacked the care-free gaiety associated with irresponsible youth.

The setting, executed by members of the society, was a delightful piece of elegant simplicity and formed a fitting background for the exquisite pictures that ensued.

PHILIP L. LORRAINE.

THE FUTURE OF POETIC DRAMA

By T. S. Eliot

An Address delivered to the International Theatre Congress, Stratford-on-Avon, in July.

I SHOULD consider it an impertinence to endeavour to instruct such an audience as this on the nature of poetic drama in general; or to discuss what can be done better, and what can not be done so well, in verse drama compared with prose. Nor do I wish to talk about the future of verse drama in all languages. With any of these arts, the material of which is *words*, its future depends upon the situation of a particular language at a particular time, and, I may add, in a particular place. Therefore I shall limit myself, in the time at my disposal, to the future of poetic drama in English, and in England. I would not even venture to discuss its future in America. I hope that, by confining myself within these limits, I may be able to make a few remarks of greater interest, and I hope of more usefulness, than if I roamed about a larger field.

Assuming, therefore, that a flourishing poetic drama is desirable, its establishment depends obviously upon the happy concurrence of four classes of people: the authors, the producers, the actors, and the public. I will say at once that our deficiency is likely to be in the first and third—authors and actors—rather than in producers or public. To producers I need not devote much attention. We have actually a number of producers who are willing to experiment with contemporary verse plays, and several who would prefer to specialise in them: and among these producers are a few at least who are thoroughly competent. And I am speaking primarily of those who are willing to produce verse plays as a commercial venture: if we add the producers and groups of interested people who are eager for verse plays for occasional productions for religious and charitable purposes, the current demand for such plays is very considerable. There is always, in fact, a serious shortage of contemporary verse plays, from the producer's point of view.

As for the public, I think that the last few years have proved that there is less resistance to verse as a dramatic medium than was formerly supposed. There is, I believe, a small public which *prefers*, other things being equal, that plays should be in verse. These are the people who go seldom to the theatre,

except to performances of Shakespeare: they may not be very plentiful, but they are the nucleus of our public. There is a larger public which is quite glad of the occasional variety of a poetic play, and this public I think could be enlarged almost indefinitely, if we can break down the assumption—hitherto quite justified—that a play in verse is a play written by a man who does not know how to write plays. I am disregarding the accidental public which is attracted to one play or another by its subject-matter—religious or political—and which is neither interested nor competent to judge of anything but the soundness or congeniality of the ideas expressed or the causes advocated. I am only concerned with the public which is, or is capable of being, interested in dramatic poetry.

I do not wish to exaggerate the avidity of the appetite for verse plays. It is certainly prudence on the part of producers at present to launch such plays in small theatres, and it is prudence for the authors to construct plays which do not require large casts or expensive setting. It is to the good when the plays are such as can also be acted by amateurs, without too much agony for the amateurs or for their audiences. But I believe that the public for verse plays is all that we are in a position to ask, and that the next thing necessary is to have more and better verse plays. And, at the same time, to educate more actors capable of acting in verse—and I say acting in verse, not merely declaiming poetry.

I will pass on to the problem of the actor, in order to end with the problem of the author—that which I might be supposed to understand most fully. The position of the actor at present is very difficult. Assuming that he sticks to the stage, and does not divert any of his activity to the film—which further complicates the problem—he comes with a training and experience of plays in prose: indeed of plays for the most part of which can hardly be said to be written even in prose—the actor's success may have been due to his ability to reproduce the ordinary broken English of the ordinary Englishman of to-day. By "prose" I mean something at least a little better than what the ordinary man speaks: I do not believe that people in the seventeenth century talked like Congreve's characters, and

THE FUTURE OF POETIC DRAMA

we know that the middle classes of the last generation did not employ the beautiful English of Mr. Shaw. And if the actor has devoted most of his time to Shakespeare, the situation is hardly better. I have said elsewhere that we cannot expect actors to speak Shakespeare properly until we can give them good contemporary dramatic verse to speak: until then the verse of Shakespeare must remain largely a dead language. The tendency in speaking Shakespeare has been to avoid self-consciousness and artificiality only at the cost of making his verse sound as much like prose as possible. This tradition is so strong as to provide one reason why a contemporary verse play in English *cannot* be written in regular blank verse. And so far as my own experimentation has carried me, I believe that the kinds of versification which are possible for verse plays to-day are such as will make very great demands upon the intelligence and the attentiveness of the actor. I say attentiveness, because I am sure that good modern verse cannot be well spoken without studying each line by itself. The moment an actor speaks each line as if the stresses and the long and short syllables were in exactly the same position as in the preceding line, the result is a soporific drone such as has sometimes been imposed upon Shakespeare. The cause is partly that versification, so far as it is taught at all, is traditionally taught wrong (just as, according to that great authority Professor Jespersen, English grammar has been taught as if it was Latin), and partly that with speaking verse, as with singing or playing, there is no substitute for being born with a good ear.

It is possible that, to get perfect verse speech from actors, we may eventually have to choose them very young, seeking a happy combination of histrionic ability with an ear for dramatic poetry, and then see that they are in a position to refuse to take part in any prose plays, except perhaps a very few. No proposals from authors whose prose falls below the standards of Congreve or Mr. Shaw should be entertained. Our perfect verse actor, you see, will have to be something of a hero and an ascetic, if not a martyr.

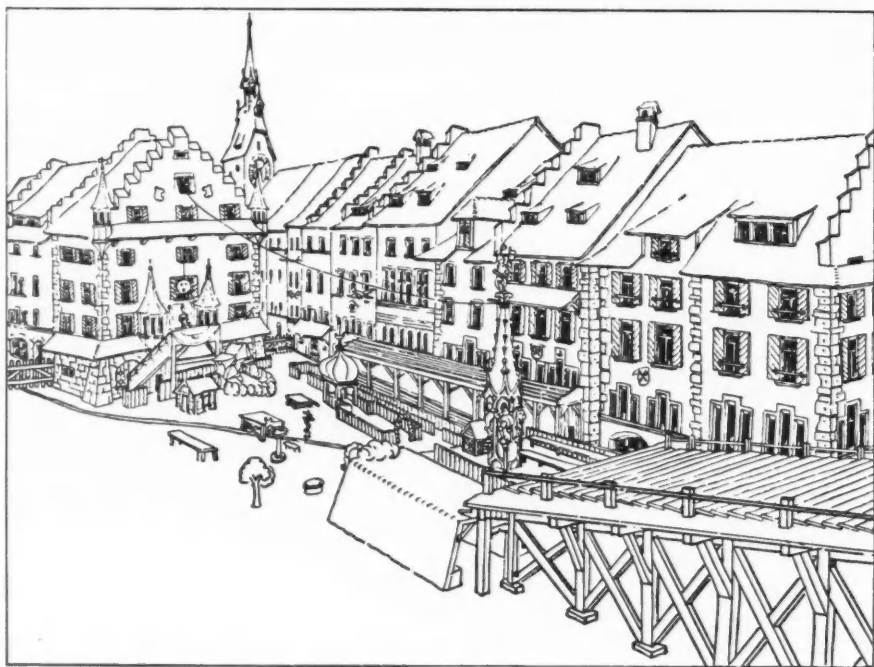
What I have said about the actor makes clear that the actor for verse plays waits not only upon the public but upon the authors. A successful play is the result of co-operation between authors, actors, producers, and public—the parts are interdependent; but at present

I should say that the next move is with the authors. We are in the rather humiliating position that the demand foractable verse plays actually exceeds the supply. I have said elsewhere, and I still believe, that, failing the appearance of a spontaneous genius who should have equal and supreme gifts as both dramatist and poet, we are more likely to get tolerable verse plays from poets who have laboured to learn the art of the theatre, than from dramatists who have toiled to write verse. But the poet has a great deal to learn. He has not only to learn everything that the successful dramatist knows, but he has his special labour of investigation. It is not sufficient to learn the craft of the theatre and then fill your play with good poetry; you have to learn to write a special kind of poetry which is different from what you have written before. To put it in the simplest terms: a poet writes his ordinary poetry implicitly to be spoken by *himself*: he must write his dramatic poetry remembering that it is to be spoken by someone else. This is a very important distinction. I find that in my first draft of a play there are passages which seem to me first-rate, and they are likely to be the ones that I have to remove. They may be plums, but if so it is right that plums should be pulled out; they are poetry, but they are my poetry and not that of my character who speaks them. When a poet, however brilliant and accomplished, begins to write for the theatre, he must regard himself as a beginner, not only in the theatre, but in a new kind of verse. So he needs to acquire a good deal of humility: I can hold out to him the hope that his labour may result in a certain moral purification, even if it has no other result.

I am not altogether hopeful, for the following reasons, one economic, the other moral and social. A poet beginning to write for the theatre cannot be sure that as a result of great labour he will write a good play: and even if it is a good play there is no reason to be confident that it will succeed. It is very difficult for him to find the time. Unless a poet has an independent income, he must have some occupation to live by, for one cannot support oneself by poetry. By the time he can arrange his life so as to be able to give the time to writing plays—and that means, for one author at least, three hours a morning *regularly*—he is likely to have a good many other calls upon his time: such as invitations



SCENE FROM "VOR AERE OG VOR MAGT"
 ("OUR HONOUR AND OUR MIGHT") BY
 NORDAHL GRIEG, AT THE ROYAL THEATRE,
 COPENHAGEN. SETTING BY HELGE REFN.



THE LUCERNE "WEINMARKT" IN THE
XVITH CENTURY, SHOWING STANDS AND
DECORATIONS FOR THE PASSION-PLAY OF
1583.
Reconstructed after a plan by Renwart
Cysat.

THE FUTURE OF POETIC DRAMA

to speak in public. It is still more difficult if he has, as several poets under my observation have, other interests. It is a result of the social conditions of our time that any active, intelligent and earnest writer is likely to have several public interests. To some extent this is necessary, to keep one's soul and mind awake. There is further temptation in the fact that increasing reputation provides a man with some audience for almost anything that he chooses to talk about. One of the most promising attempts in poetic drama, amongst those of my younger contemporaries, is the "Trial of a Judge" by my friend Stephen Spender. But when I consider the number of interests that occupy Mr. Spender, I wonder whether he will ever find the time to perfect the art he has begun.

This sounds a dismal note on which to end, but I think we shall only get anywhere by

facing the difficulties first. In view of the success, even when only of esteem, of a few verse plays in the last few years, I think we are likely to see a succession of young writers each trying his hand at a verse play, only to drop the drama when he finds that his first effort does not meet with enthusiastic approval. Just as a great many people to-day write novels, but we have very few novelists. What I should prefer to see—and it is the only way for poetic drama to have any future at all—is that a very few poets should devote themselves exclusively and continuously, so far as their circumstances permit, to this medium of expression. Assuming that we continue to produce a little poetic talent of a high enough level, then we can have a poetic drama; but it will exact of the authors conviction, ardour, and sacrifice.

THE LUCERNE PASSION-PLAY

THERE is nothing grandiose about the Lucerne Passion-Drama; the production is of the simplest, and the players—men, women and children—chosen from every class of the population of Lucerne.

A brief history of the Lucerne Passion-Plays is interesting. The clergy used to play them in the Cathedral from about 1450 to 1470, when the Brotherhood of the Crown of Thorns was founded. (Incidentally the oldest amateur dramatic society in Europe.) From that later date they were played by the people on the "Weinmarkt", which is still almost untouched to this day. Thanks to the manuscripts which were kept, largely the work of the clergy, a complete record is available of those early productions, and contains the minutest details; sketches, notes, actors, costumes, which have been preserved in the city's archives.

For the production, large stands were erected round the "Weinmarkt" with seating accommodation for some 3,000 people. The performance generally lasted for two days—sometimes longer! Altogether, about 350 people took part (in keeping with the times men took women's parts) and the audience included the Papal Nuncios, Dukes of Savoy, and other equivalents of our present-day "diplomatic corps".

Renwart Cysat (1545-1614) is the most famous figure connected with the Lucerne Passion-Plays of the Middle Ages. He is regarded by many as the father of Swiss folklore and Folk Drama. Employed as an archivist in the town, he was in an excellent position for furthering his studies, and it is due largely to him that the records have been preserved in the archives. He was stage-manager for the productions in 1571, 1583, and 1597, and also prepared the play of 1616, but unfortunately died before the performance. His writings include a play "Discover of the Cross" and a Carnival. Undoubtedly the Lucerne Passion-Dramas reached a higher standard under the guidance of Renwart Cysat than at any time previously.

The man responsible for the Passion-Plays of 1934 and 1938 is Dr. Oskar Eberle, the reviver of the Swiss Folk Theatre. For from the time of Cysat, the "Volks theater" gradually declined. It is difficult to find an adequate explanation, and is not satisfactory to attribute this decline to one of the periodical cycles of depression which seem to steal over a nation's Folk Drama. A more likely and sensible reason is that the rival cantons in Switzerland, through their warring instincts, tended to disrupt all form of Art, and that once the mag-

THE LUCERNE PASSION-PLAY

netic influence of Cysat had gone, there remained no one capable of holding together the tradition and custom connected with a Passion-Play.

Dr. Eberle is certainly the most famous stage-manager since Cysat. His efforts and work have resulted in a remarkable growth of public interest towards the hitherto latent Folk Drama, and his "History of the Theatre in Central Switzerland" proves him an able and capable exponent of the peculiar conditions governing the Swiss "Volkstheater", and of European Drama as a whole. Admitted by all students in Central Europe as an acknowledged authority, he became an international figure when he stage-managed the unique festival of Calderon's "World Theatre" which was played before the pilgrims' Church of the 1000-year-old monastery of Einsiedeln.

To meet him is an unforgettable experience. Tall and commanding, he is possessed of terrific energy and zest for his subject, and is undeniably "a man of the theatre". It is his belief that a general revival of world interest in Folk Drama is necessary before the standard of the popular play can be raised; better the simple than the elaborate; the natural to the sophisticated; the simple beauty which is born of the Folk Theatre, the poetry of the people, is the material at hand for the would-be dramatist.

The performance of the Passion-Drama in front of Lucerne Cathedral was an experience which I am never likely to forget. Tiny lights glittered high up over the players; the famous organ of the Cathedral, constructed by the Salzburger Master Hans Geissler during the eleven years 1640-1651, accompanied the bells, and the choirs of angels and people. These were the stage-effects; for the rest, the University professor acted side by side with the accountant or book-keeper or factory worker; a typist played Mary—a shop girl Magdalene. This was the real Folk Drama of which I had dreamed; beauty, simplicity, tragedy, and the hope in the resurrection possessed a new meaning.

The text was by Dr. Eberle, and the music by Von J. B. Hilber. The latter aided greatly the general performance, but what impressed me most of all was the grouping. I noticed that it followed the Greek tradition of being well in the wings. At the trial scene they were well able to move forward and thus complete the picture, allowing the stage from

back to front (centre) to remain perfectly clear for Jesus, with soldiers (a colourful display) up stage left and right.

This production definitely stamps Dr. Eberle as a leading man in the contemporary world theatre.

J. R.

A NEW VENTURE IN RELIGIOUS DRAMA

By E. Martin Browne

CHRISTIANITY can never be left out of the theatre. It is fine dramatic material for one thing, and it is deeply rooted in our civilisation for another. A good play with a Christian story and outlook, especially if it is orthodox, will make as big a success as any secular play. We have seen "Murder in the Cathedral" and "The Zeal of Thy House" do it lately. More are doubtless to follow: for the growth of the religious drama has been as rapid as that of the secular, and Festivals like Canterbury and Tewkesbury are as creative in their way as those of Malvern or Buxton.

The problems of religious plays differ in some respects from those of the secular stage. For one thing, they are mostly promoted and acted by people holding a definite common faith: this tends to increase their sincerity, but to decrease their technical ability; and it also means that they accept assistance on different grounds. Then, too, they ask that their plays say something, rather than be well made or theatrically effective: the fault of religious plays is usually not in their matter but in their manner. Unique again is the problem of producing in church. These are a few of the ways in which a special kind of help is needed.

The Religious Drama Society has existed for ten years to give this help; but it has now taken on a new lease of life, through a re-organisation in which I have been appointed Director. It offers, at a subscription of 5s.

A NEW VENTURE IN RELIGIOUS DRAMA

a year, expert advice on play-choosing and every branch of production, a lending-library, a reading service for MSS., a small magazine, and privilege tickets for productions sponsored by the Society all over Great Britain. The present tour of "The Zeal of Thy House" with the London Company is under its management. It hopes to band together all those, numbering many thousands, who believe that the art of drama may be a medium for conveying religious truth and for expressing worship.

In the broadest sense, all drama should do both: and the Society is very grateful to the British Drama League for its help and encouragement, which reinforce the conviction that, even though a special body be useful for special problems, there is no barrier between one kind of drama and another. Already the League and the Society have a number of members in common, and both would like to increase the number.

The Religious Drama Society's greater usefulness depends upon that increase, and I hope that anyone who believes in its value will send his or her first *js. soon* to me at

S.P.C.K. House,

Northumberland Avenue, W.C.2.

E. MARTIN BROWNE,

Hon. Director,

Religious Drama Society.

or had even been once mentioned in English literature, when Shakespeare used it? I cannot find it named once. In the present state of my knowledge (or ignorance) I believe that "Master-mistress" is a coinage of the Great Coiner for no other purpose than to have a jest with the friend of whom he had said:

"His browny locks did hang in crooked curls

"And every light occasion of the wind

"Upon his lips their silken parcels hurls....

"His qualities were beauteous as his form

"For maiden tongued he was and thereof free

"Yet if men moved him was he such a storm

"As oft 'twixt May and April was to see

"When winds breathe sweet unruly though they be....", etc.

In these and similar lines I believe we have the home and origin of the compound word "Master-mistress" which has no standing in the English language. The New English (Oxford) Dictionary would have none of it. It is not even mentioned there. An unwholesome imagination has in my opinion pushed a humorous and apposite and innocent expression into a disagreeable world-wide prominence. It would be of the greatest help if someone would give us the pedigree of "Master-mistress" if it has one. If it is found in pre-Shakespeare times, did it then mean a homosexual accomplice?

Personally I do not believe we are justified in thinking "Master-mistress" in the 20th Sonnet to mean more than "The handsome man with the features of a woman who is the predominant personality of the passion or poem called 'A Lover's Complaint'".

Is it quite fair to bracket Shakespearean Sonnets in general with Marlowe's words in "Edward II" which make clear reference to moral perversity? When the two writers are so bracketed I think it is reasonable to ask that Shakespeare's actual words should be quoted. I have microscopically examined the Sonnets without finding any single word with possible homosexual tendency except what we find in Sonnet No. 20 and there of course the disagreeable bearing at once vanishes on analysis.

Yours faithfully,

WALTER THOMSON.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A SHAKESPEARE PROBLEM.

DEAR SIR,

I was glad to have a few words of criticism on my "Sonnets of Shakespeare and Southampton" from Dr. Boas, who is an acknowledged authority on Elizabethan problems.

Dr. Boas agrees that there is a great deal to be said for my contention that "passion" should be given the meaning of an "emotional poem". I am glad to have that, although it is not exactly enthusiastic approval. He even minimises his faint praise by saying that it does not make such a fundamental difference as I claim, and he adds that the phrase "Master-mistress" remains. I am sure, however, he will grant that there is something fundamentally different between "Master-mistress of my amorous desire" and "Master-mistress of my poem".

Here we reach a definite point which I dealt with in my book—the meaning of the compound word "Master-mistress". May I ask if anyone can tell us if the compound word "Master-mistress" was common,

Note by Dr. Boas.

I do not think that anything would be gained by my trying to amplify the words that I carefully used in my review of Mr. Thomson's book in "Drama" with reference to the phrase "master-mistress". But I agree with Mr. Thomson that it would be interesting to know if there is any precedent for its use before Sonnet 20.

CURRENT RELEASES.

Included among the new releases announced by Messrs. Samuel French are: "Black Swans", "House-master", "Spot of Bother", "People at Sea", and "Jane Eyre". Notable in Messrs. James B. Pinker's new list are: "The Unknown Warrior", "People in Love", "The First Legion", and "Bitter Harvest".

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
INCORPORATING
THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

President :
LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

Chairman of the Council :
VISCOUNT ESHER

Director : GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

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MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary at the Office of the League, 9, Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.

Telephone : EUSTON 2666.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

IT would be idle to deny that this number of "Drama" has gone to press under a cloud of apprehension which we know will have been shared by all our readers. By the time it is in their hands decisions will have been taken which may affect the life of the whole country in its every manifestation. If peace is preserved we can breathe again. The alternative, which Heaven forbid, may affect not only the social but the cultural life of Great Britain to an extent which cannot be foreseen. The spirit of Drama, however, will survive, and it will be the League's duty to cherish it so far as conditions may allow. If need be, members of the League will be duly informed of what, in our opinion, they can best do towards this end, as well as of any modifications which may be found necessary in the day-to-day policy of the League.

If all is well, the new dramatic season opens in an unusual ferment of activity and promise, as the pages of this issue of "Drama" evince.

These activities include the opening of new Schools for amateur drama, Mr. Priestley's interesting venture at the Westminster Theatre, besides the important foundation of a Branch of the British Drama League in New South Wales. Then, too, there is the novel Festival experiment in the Northern Area, where for the first time a full-length play Festival, with open choice of play, is to be tried out on a large scale. Committees are also meeting for the organisation of the next British Drama League one-act play Festival. Our own Drama League Schools at Scarborough and Buxton were well attended and should release new and skilled talent in the craft of production for the benefit of many centres throughout the land.

Not only does the text of "Drama" display this promise and achievement, but we are happy to draw our readers' attention to the fact that our publicity pages contain a total of advertisements which surpasses all previous records. This, of course, is a tribute to the publicity value of the League's magazine, which, as time goes on, becomes more and more appreciated as a medium for announcements both trading and personal. It may interest our readers to know that the normal printing order for "Drama" is in excess of 5,000 copies, all of which, except for a few kept on our files, are put into circulation.

The National Theatre is in an equally hopeful position. By the end of the year, all being well, we may look for some important developments which will bring the culmination of the project appreciably nearer.

Particulars of the Conference at Bournemouth from October 28th to 30th are being circulated to all members with this copy of "Drama". It is hoped that we may have a large attendance.

The League will contribute an exhibit to the forthcoming "Women's Fair" at Olympia from November 2nd—26th.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

"Shakespearian Comedy." By H. B. Charlton. Methuen. 10s. 6d.

"Moscow Rehearsals." By Norris Houghton. Allen and Unwin. 12s. 6d.

"Fifty Years a Showman." By J. Bannister Howard. Hutchinson. 12s. 6d.

"School Drama." Edited by Guy Boas and Howard Hayden. Methuen. 7s. 6d.

"The King of Nowhere and Other Plays." By James Bridie. Constable. 7s. 6d.

"April Clouds." By Peggy Barwell and Miles Malleson. French. 2s.

"Festival Time." By Lionel Hale. Deane. 2s. 6d.

"Second Spring." By Emmet Lavery. Longmans. 6s.

"Six Competition One-Act Plays." Muller. 3s. 6d.

"Twenty One-Act Plays." Selected by John Hampden. Everyman's Library. Dent. 2s.

THE lectures given by Professor H. B. Charlton at the John Rylands Library, Manchester, for eight successive years, have been brought together and, without much rewriting, presented under the title of "Shakespearian Comedy". The result is an exceedingly interesting survey of the comedies from "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" (which receives some of the most discerning as well as some of the most amusing criticism in the book) to the "consummation" of "Much Ado", "Twelfth Night" and "As You Like It". Shrewd flashes of humour constantly illuminate the author's exhaustive knowledge of his subject; Shylock and Falstaff are closely studied, and "The Merchant of Venice" emerges as a more conflicting jumble of divided loyalties than ever. On the subject of the "dark comedies", Professor Charlton, while stating that in the interpretation of Shakespeare novelty is its own condemnation, propounds a somewhat novel theory himself; and it is difficult, despite persuasive reasoning, to agree that there is a preponderating ethical and optimistic basis in plays such as "All's Well", "Measure for Measure", and "Troilus and Cressida". But despite elements of controversy, the slow but insistent development of Shakespeare's comedies, from imperfect attempts to mould old forms nearer to the heart's desire to the final rich blossoming of the three masterpieces, is shown with convincing clarity and distinction.

"Moscow Rehearsals" is the account by an American author, Mr. Norris Houghton, of six months' study of the Soviet Theatre. It is mainly concerned with the actual work of production and rehearsal, and, in consequence, is more interesting than some books on the Russian theatre, because one is given closely observed details of the daily life in the great Moscow theatres instead of vague panegyrics. Not that Mr. Houghton fails in admiration; even in the last chapter, "Moscow Revisited", which, fortunately, brings the book more into line with modern developments, he is still hopeful of better things to come, despite the ravages of a "Committee on Art", whose main purpose seems to be a frustration of any genuine progress. But most of Mr. Houghton's time was spent when the Moscow theatres were at their finest, and the accounts of the

work of Stanislavski, Meierhold, Tairov, Vakhtangov, and many others, are absorbing. The author admires, as others have done, the lengthy, not to say dilatory, process of rehearsals (which last from eight months to a year and a half), tiny scenes being repeated incessantly for weeks. No doubt the final polish has to be seen to be believed, but the method, in cold print, appears to be overdone to the point of hysteria, and one almost credits the tale (of "doubtful authenticity") of the opening words of a play—"Shall I shave you now, sir?"—being rehearsed for six months, after which the play was abandoned because the actor could not say the line correctly! As was to be expected, the illustrations are a fascinating addition to the book.

"Those were the days", writes Dame Sybil Thorndike in her preface to Mr. J. Bannister Howard's "Fifty Years a Showman", and, as Mr. Howard quickly proves, both he and the theatre flourished exceedingly in that peaceful, friendly world which vanished so tragically in 1914. There were, of course, the usual ups and downs of a showman's life, but Mr. Bannister Howard, in his breezy, genial and discursive book, records more ups than downs—but this is not surprising with anyone who had the luck to be connected with successes such as "The Sign of the Cross", "The Belle of New York" (obviously the author's favourite), and "Tons of Money". Mr. Howard is refreshingly frank about his adventures; in early days he did not shrink from hiring a well-known executioner as a possible advertisement, or from arranging an "attempted assassination" of an actress (both enterprises being singularly unsuccessful!); and he admits that he completely miscalculated the future of the film. This frankness, and the good nature with which he discusses every aspect of theatrical life, are attractive features of the book. The turf enters into the scene and we are given strange glimpses of that curious world; we are also given many glimpses of the stars Mr. Howard discovered both before and after their success. One wishes more could have been told of the partnership between Sir Philip Ben Greet and Mr. Bannister Howard, two men so dissimilar that collaboration was bound to result either in complete fiasco or the huge success it undoubtedly became; and probably some of the stories are funnier in the telling than they are in the reading—but the author has reason to be pleased with his "informal record of a busy but informal sort of life".

"School Drama. Its Practice and Theory" is a comparatively small book, but in scope and achievement it is impressive. Edited for the School Drama Committee of the British Drama League by Mr. Guy Boas and Mr. Howard Hayden, every problem of the school theatre, as Mr. Whitworth points out in his preface, is dealt with by acknowledged experts. The first section concerns classroom work, the second with the actual staging of the play. Among the many authors, Mr. Howard Hayden is especially interesting on "Production and Rehearsals"; Miss Dorothy Coates, writing in rather lighter vein than the rest (some of the articles suffer from an involved solemnity), is helpful on "Choosing the Play"; Mr. Angus describes with characteristic clearness "The School Stage"; Mrs.

RECENT BOOKS

Nesfield Cookson is excellent on "Costume and Make-up"; while Miss Elsie Fogerty adds value to the book with "The Elements of Speech". There is also an admirable article by Mr. F. Allen on "Shakespeare to Sheridan". In addition, Lighting, Settings, Stage Effects, Mime, Marionettes and Religious Drama are ably considered, and the illustrations are to the point, especially those showing "Doing A Play—Old Style and New Style", and the transformation of an awkward "peninsular" platform into an Elizabethan stage.

From Messrs. Constable comes a volume of Mr. James Bridie's new plays: "The King of Nowhere", "Babes in the Wood", and "The Last Trump". It is, naturally, an interesting volume; full of ideas, sometimes brilliant and provocative, and, if the so-called canons of drama are to be considered, frequently irrelevant. The first play, "The King of Nowhere" (for six women and sixteen men), is an almost complete disappointment. Beginning, as each play does, with an arresting situation and a collection of well-drawn characters, the piece drifts on, and although Vivaldi, the semi-madman and consummate actor and his wealthy altruistic patron, Miss Rimmer, both promise great things, the social revolution they planned peters out miserably, and we are left with the depressing conclusion that "The King of Nowhere" has led nowhere. "Babes in the Wood" (for four women and six men) is, in the present reviewer's opinion, by far the best. Extravagant it may be with fantastic characterisation, but the piece (after its irrelevant opening with the schoolboy) has both a unity and a pattern, and the adventures of the two babes, Margaret and Bob Gillet, in a cracked bohemian world, lead to an enjoyable and convincing end. The play does not make so many technical demands upon the cast as the others, and should prove a definite success when acted with the wit, intelligence and freshness the more advanced amateurs can bring to a production. "The Last Trump" (for seven women and seven men) is again a disappointment, because the situation caused by the threat of the end of the world, however beneficial it may be to the masterful invalid, Buchlyvic, once more peters out rather lamely, at least in this version. But the characterisation is virtually strong enough to atone for weakness in construction, and the eminent physician, Sir Gregory Butt (alas, that he is only allowed to appear in Act II), is a memorable addition to Mr. Bridie's strange gallery of portraits.

A critic has described "April Clouds" by Miss Peggy Barwell and Mr. Miles Malleon as "a pleasant little play". This seems an inadequate description of a comedy in three acts (for six women and five men) mainly concerned with the reactions for the first time of a group of youngsters, whose ages range from thirteen to eighteen, to various aspects of love. The son and daughter of the house discover that the mother is in the midst of an affair with a Captain Wainwright, and, chiefly by means of a "secret society", endeavour to right the wrong. However, the problem solves itself, to the relief of everyone on the stage, and, we imagine, when the play is performed, to most people in the audience.

The producer's note to "Festival Time", a comedy in three acts by Mr. Lionel Hale, stresses the lightness of the work—"It is a frolic, and it must be played as a frolic". Certainly, much of the gaiety of Festival time at Salzburg has been captured, and among the cast (eight women and ten men) are some very amusing

characters—Max, the gentle hotel-keeper, is delightful, and so is the eminent and overpowering Alessandro Viatelli. But Amyas and his official and unofficial wives, Julia and Christine, tend to be more tiresome and frolicsome, and it takes all the deft touches of atmosphere and the Machiavellian subtlety of Viatelli to sustain interest in three rather silly people.

Presumably there are still readers who will realise from the title, "Second Spring", that Mr. Emmet Lavery's play concerns Cardinal Newman. But to many this long, detailed and effective play will reveal for the first time the struggles, disappointments and triumphs of one of the most sensitive and unusual of saints—and surely few will now deny Newman's claim to sainthood? Mr. Lavery's task has been formidable; Newman's career was troubled enough, but he never dramatised it in any form as this record shows; and it says much for the author's skill and thorough understanding of his subject that one follows the slow progress of the Oxford graduate of 1822 to the radiant and aged Cardinal of 1880 with increasing interest and sympathy. The cast is very large; hardly a person of any importance in Newman's life has been omitted, and the scenic demands are greater than the author is disposed to realise—although parts can be doubled and modern stagecraft admits few difficulties. But this is a fine play; in its essence somewhat depressing—more humour is needed—nevertheless, Mr. Lavery has given us an unusually convincing presentation of seventy years of heroic suffering and achievement.

The plays in the anthology entitled "Six Competition One-Act Plays" were chosen from entries submitted for the Playwrights' Club Competition. Each one is a competent piece of work, and the collection is well contrasted. Mr. Clifford Bax, who helped to adjudicate four of them, placed first "The Fortieth Man" (one woman and six men), a Roman play of Martyrdom A.D. 320, by Miss Freda Collins, and second "Interrupted" (four men), a war episode of 1917 by Mr. Robert F. Norwood, first performed at the Clifton Arts Club. Both plays have vivid qualities, but we were struck with the fresh charm and originality of "The End of a Fairy Tale" (two women and two men), a comedy concerning the Brothers Grimm, freely adapted from the German by Miss Violet Rutter. Mr. T. B. Morris bravely faces the difficulties of bringing Shakespeare on the stage in "Fair Youth and Dark Lady" (three women and four men); Miss Winifred Fraser's "Roses and Rue" (five women), another play concerning war, has a neatly tragic ending; and Mr. Kenneth Rose's "Breaking the News" (one woman and three men) is powerful, if simpler in thought and construction than the others.

The one-act play may be said to have received further canonisation by its appearance in the Everyman's Library. Mr. John Hampden was indeed well fitted for the task of selecting twenty plays for this famous series, and, although the difficulties must have been great and there are some inevitable omissions, the volume he presents is surprisingly comprehensive. Virtually all the famous names appear from Synge and Lady Gregory to Noel Coward and work as different as Dr. Bottomley's "Culbin Sands" and Mr. Corrie's "Dewers of Coal", or Lord Dunsany's "A Night at an Inn" and Mr. St. John Ervine's "Progress", reveal the scope of the book. It is a remarkable two shillings' worth, and anyone who wants a representative collection of short plays which have made history since the rise of the amateurs would do well to possess a copy.

OUR WESTMINSTER SEASON

By J. R. Priestley

READERS of "Drama" are interested in the serious Theatre, so I need not apologise for claiming a little space here in order to tell you what we are doing at the Westminster Theatre. This summer the London Mask Theatre Company Ltd. came into existence. Its directors are Mr. Ronald Jeans, Mr. Michael MacOwan (whose brilliant productions at the Westminster are well known), Mr. Thane Parker (who has been at that theatre as manager for some time), and myself. The company cannot make a profit; it has been accepted by the proper authorities as a purely artistic and educational enterprise; so that its patrons will not be asked to pay entertainment tax. Our object is to provide London with a theatre that will be less expensive than the ordinary West End playhouse but that will offer playgoers a series of productions of genuine merit. So long as our company is operating we believe it will be impossible for any visitor to London to say that he could not find an intelligent play to see at a reasonable price.

About a dozen very carefully selected players will be under contract to us for the whole season, so that we may expect some good team-work. Among them are Ruth Lodge, who has been playing the leading parts at the Liverpool Repertory Playhouse for the last two years, Robert Harris and Stephen Murray. But we shall have guest artistes too, especially for obviously "star" rôles. The season's programme has given us a lot of trouble, for we wanted an attractive balance of really fine plays, some old, others modern. We open with Shakespeare's seldom-performed "Troilus and Cressida", but because its prevailing mood of bitter disillusion with all the heroics of war seems so contemporary, we are trying the experiment of doing it in modern dress and setting. Our next production will be Andreyev's "He Who Gets Slapped", a work of strange power that has not been seen in London for a long time. After that we do my own play, "Dangerous Corner", partly because people have been asking for a revival of it for some time now, and partly too because it gives our company a fine chance of showing their team-work. Then our Christmas production will be Goldsmith's "The Good-Natured Man", a comedy that is never seen these days and one that, in spite of an absurd

plot, is worth seeing, if only for two superb comic characters. Then later we hope to do Calderon's masterpiece, "Life Is A Dream", and possibly O'Neill's "Marco's Millions". Our further plans will depend upon public support—*your* support, ladies and gentlemen. I can assure you that at this very minute all of us at the Westminster are doing our best to deserve that support. So—as fellow-enthusiasts of the Theatre—will you all help us, please?

P.S.—Because we are entirely non-commercial and because there are now several "try-out" theatres in or near London, we are not doing new plays at all, only revivals. So please do not send us your manuscripts. Send us all your friends instead.

THE DRAMA LEAGUE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

IN considering the report of the League, it felt that those who initiated this movement in Australia are entitled to look back with some pride on their year's work. The general aim of the League, "to assist the development of the art of the theatre, and to promote a right relation between drama and the life of the community," has been kept in view, and efforts have been made to achieve three immediate objects—the foundation of a Library, the holding of Festivals of Community Drama, and the building of Theatres in Sydney—as announced in our leaflet of last year.

The prime needs of such a League are members and money. At the end of our financial year our membership totalled exactly 200, made up as follows:—A. *Affiliated Societies*, Sydney and suburbs, 37 (of which 11 are junior societies); societies, country and interstate, 23 (of which 8 are junior). B. *Individuals*, Sydney and suburbs, 128; country and interstate, 10; honorary, 2. Of our two honorary members, Miss Benjamin addressed various gatherings to stir up interest in the establishment of the League here, paid for the printing of our leaflet, and gave the Fay Compton Cup; while Miss Nicholas, by

THE DRAMA LEAGUE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

her voluntary work during the second half of 1937, made it possible to open headquarters and establish our Library. In addition to her invaluable services as Hon. Office Secretary, Miss Nicholas lent us a typewriter which we still use, and worked very hard indeed for the success of our Ball.

Obviously, it would have been impossible to do what we have done during the year, if we had had to rely solely on membership subscriptions for funds. Fortunately, some of our members, when writing out their cheques, thought in guineas instead of shillings. Also, Bryant's Playhouse was the first of our affiliated societies to give us a benefit performance, and the Dajonian Repertory Society followed suit, to our great financial advantage. We hope that the lead given by these two acting groups will be taken up by others during the current year.

Of our three immediate objects, the Library is the one with which we have made most progress. It now contains close on 600 volumes. This we owe first to the nine Council Members—Mrs. Adamson, Mr. Bisset, Mr. Blackwood, Mr. Catts, Mr. Napier, Mr. Raven, Mrs. Thomas, Mr. Tighe, and Miss Tildesley—who contributed £5 each to a Loan Fund for the purchase of books, and then to those who have given books as donations—Lady Gordon, Miss Dumolo, Miss Gillespie, Mrs. Heath Green, Mr. Hahn, Madame Jensen, Mr. Harold King, Miss Matthews, Miss Nicholas, Miss Ranken, Mrs. Thomas, Miss Tildesley, Miss Vallentine and Mrs. White. Also, we have received two generous gifts to the Library, of 50 volumes from Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, Director of the British Drama League in London, and of 120 copies of plays from Messrs. J. B. Pinker & Sons. The latter were obtained for us by Miss Gould, who was very active as our representative in London during her trip abroad last year. Finally, the Rev. C. T. Parkinson has made available to our members his collection of 39 sets of plays for play-readings. As regards our Library, there are only two drawbacks. First, we must somehow raise money to pay off the Loan Fund; second, although our collection is well chosen and comprehensive, there are still some obvious gaps, and as new plays are published we ought to add them.

Towards our second object—the organisation of (a) a Conference and (b) a Festival of Community Drama—our progress has not been so marked. We have made no plans for a Conference, such as is held annually in Great Britain, but we have accepted an invitation, as representing drama, to join the Council of Associated Arts, which has plans for promoting an Arts Week, during which some sessions might be devoted to the dramatic arts. And although we have not been able to organise a Festival of Community Drama in Sydney so far, last November, through the good offices of Mrs. Higgins, we held one in Wagga, to which Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Heath Green, and Mr. Tighe went as Adjudicators; to these four Council Members, and to Mr. Thomas, who provided the transport, thanks are

due for pioneering what should develop into an important part of the League's work. We are now considering a second Country Festival in co-operation with the newly-formed Glen Innes Eisteddfod Committee. The Sydney Drama Society has presented us with nine trophies for use in competitions.

The third object—better theatrical accommodation for Sydney amateur groups—seems no nearer. We have during the year made one attempt to secure this by approaching the Teachers' Federation with the request that they should include a Little Theatre in their new building. In these negotiations, first Miss Collins, and then Miss Cusack, acted on our behalf, and though the proposal was eventually turned down, we did get a sympathetic hearing. With the conversion of the Savoy into a Cinema, this problem has become acute; several amateur societies have improved their clubrooms, but an alternative to St. James's Hall for public performances is badly needed.

One function of the League is "to answer any question on any subject connected with drama". This seemed rather a formidable undertaking, but so far no poser has been put to us that we could not solve. We have given advice on stage-construction, lighting, make-up, costume, and choice of plays; we have transmitted information about royalties, players, and producers. Royalties is a burning question with amateur societies. While in London, Miss Gould did her best to bring the hardships of the Australian case before the holders of the rights; and Mrs. Adamson, Mrs. Cohen, and Mrs. White, who are all now abroad, have been supplied with copies of the resolutions drawn up by our royalties sub-committee, and have undertaken to make representations on our behalf, in the hope that a satisfactory solution may be reached.

The Council met eleven times during the year, with an average attendance of fourteen. There have also been regular monthly meetings of the Executive. Sub-Committees have been appointed for—Library, Programme, Royalties, Festivals, and Competitions.

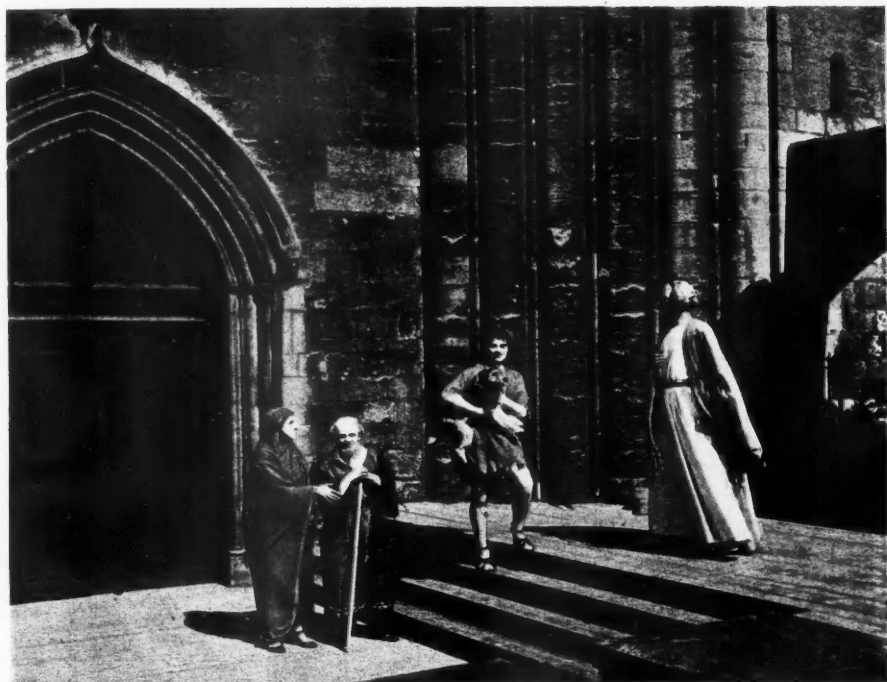
The Drama League may, as the result of the past year's operations, claim to have established itself as a not unimportant factor in the cultural life of the community. Its work, well begun, will, with the co-operation of those who comprise its growing membership, broaden the outlook and develop the interests of the Community in the Art of the Theatre and all it stands for.

RED TRIANGLE, Y.M.C.A.

Mr. Walton Anderson has been appointed Director of the Dramatic Work of the Y.M.C.A. Red Triangle Club, Plaistow. This Club has a membership of a thousand, and a little theatre of its own seating 300. The Dramatic Group forms an important part of the Club's work and is not just a section, but is run as a group theatre with a large number of Club members contributing in some way.

Mr. Anderson, who has done criticism, adjudication, and Production for the League, was recently one of the Producers at the Television Studio at Olympia.

The first production at Plaistow is to be "Winter Sunshine," on October 6th and 8th.



SCENE FROM "TOBIAS AND THE ANGEL"
BY JAMES BRIDIE, AS PERFORMED AT THE
RECENT TEWKESBURY FESTIVAL. PRO-
DUCTION BY FRANK NAPIER.



SELBORNE PAGEANT, 1938. WILLIAM OF
WYKEHAM FINDS THE CANONS OF THE
PRIORY MAYING. PRODUCTION BY MARY
KELLY.

FUNNY MEN OF ENGLAND

By S. L. Ricardo

WHEN Joey rolls in the ring, or the pantomime broker smashes the plates, or the cabaret artist sings that very broad but oh so funny song, or his brother of the music-hall and the B.B.C. cracks a jest, do you remember the long line of English funny men from whom they are descended? If not, it may surprise you to be told that the first English clown was the devil, forked tail and all. When the Mystery plays were banished from the church and even the churchyard, the Evil One became a comic character and Doomsday itself a farce in which red-nosed demons dashed about, tripping up people with their pitchforks.

Later clowns have left a name behind them. We know the Elizabethans split their sides laughing at Will Summer, Will Kemp and Richard Tarlton, who even published a best seller jest book. By this time the funny man had learnt that it pays to make the audience laugh at one another and Kemp used to do a turn between the acts of the play in which he made up rhymes at the expense of well-known people in his audience. Between each wicked rhyme came the chorus

"So pipeth the crow
Sitting upon a wall
Please one and please all."

When the Puritans shut the theatres they did not succeed in putting down the funny man. There was a certain Robert Cox who, under pretext of giving exhibitions of rope walking, went from town to town and included "Humours and Drolleries" in his performance.

The Restoration saw the triumph of wit, but it was in the eighteenth century that the funny men of the music-hall type came into their own. An old programme for Will Bullock's benefit at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, reads like a present-day variety bill: "Mr. Clinch of Barnet will perform several performances, first an organ with Three Voices, then the Huntsman, the Horn and Pack of Dogs and an old Woman of Fourscore Years of Age Nursing her Grand Child, all of which he does on the open stage with his mouth. Next a Gentleman will perform several mimic entertainments on the ladder, first he stands on the top round with a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other and drinks a health; then plays several tunes on the violin, with fifteen other surprising performances which no man himself can do. And

Will Pinkeman will dance the Miller's Dance and speak a comical joking epilogue on an Ass".

We must not forget John Rich, father of English pantomime, who played Harlequin in a novel entertainment which developed into an annual performance.

But Samuel Foote is perhaps the most notable ancestor of our funny men. Foote was as renowned for his quips in ordinary life as on the stage. When a gambler who had been thrown out of a third storey window complained of his luck, Foote told him never to play "so high" again. Foote was an educated funny man, having been to Oxford and studied for the Bar. He started the stage fashion of mimicking not only well-known men about town, but his fellow-actors. Every comedian who earns a living by imitating Garbo or Charlie Chaplin owes it to Foote.

Some of Foote's victims tried to get these performances suppressed, but he countered by turning them into parties. He issued an invitation to friends and the public to drink tea with him at the Haymarket Theatre, and added, "Sir Dilbury Diddle will be there and Lady Betty Frisk has absolutely promised". When the audience arrived Foote announced that he was rehearsing some young actors and would, with their permission, continue while tea was made. He then gave an ordinary performance, and continued to evade the licensing laws of the theatre in this way for years.

Only one intended victim ever got the better of Foote, and that was Dr. Johnson. When the Dr. heard that Foote was to impersonate him he promised to be in the front row with an outsize in cudgels. Foote thought better of it and imitated a wooden-legged printer instead. Some time after he lost his own leg through a riding accident, but this did not end his career and he produced many comic effects with the help of his peg leg. After this Dr. Johnson admitted Foote was irresistible, saying, "Sir, Foote does not make fools of his company, they whom he exposes are fools already, he only brings them into action". And ever since the British public has granted much licence to its funny men, from Munden to Robey, from Dan Leno to Mr. Chaplin.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

FESTIVALS AND PAGEANTS.

TENTH MALVERN FESTIVAL.

The success of this year's festival, under the direction of Roy Limbert, in association with Sir Cedric Hardwicke, at Malvern, shows how surely Sir Barry Jackson has laid the foundation of a theatre festival, which more than any other professional theatrical enterprise, most successfully establishes a right relation between people on both sides of the footlights. This year the festival has been particularly distinguished by attracting world premiere productions of plays written by such established playwrights as James Bridie, Lord Dunsany, C. K. Munro, J. B. Priestley and Bernard Shaw, to which last named the festival is stated to be dedicated in perpetuity.

Whilst Shaw's new play "Geneva" is somewhat disappointing, the theatrical ineffectiveness of Elisabeth Bergner's "Saint Joan" in no way dims the greatness of the Joan play. J. B. Priestley's "Music at Night", for those interested in the experimental theatre, is undoubtedly the most stimulating, and for a hearty laugh, Munro's "Coronation time at Mrs. Beams", which introduces most of the characters in his earlier work, "At Mrs. Beams", is a real delight, particularly with Jean Cadell repeating her acting success as "Miss Shoe".

Lord Dunsany's "Alexander" calls for acting in the true Shakespearean manner, in which Donald Wolfitt excels in the title part. "The Last Trump" contains much of the originality of thought and curious intermixture of subtle and broad humour which Mr. Bridie has taught us to expect of him, and Cecil Trouncer, Frank Pettingell, Marie Ault, H. R. Hignett, Alec Clunes and Hazel Terry combine to form a most distinguished cast.

This year's festival undoubtedly attracted more notabilities than ever before, and the Theatrical Garden Party on August Bank Holiday was a most brilliant social function.

BUXTON DRAMA FESTIVAL.

Whilst Buxton may not prove such a fashionable centre for a theatre festival as Malvern, yet it has the possibility of healthy development so clearly shown in this the second year. The co-operation between the Municipal Corporation, the Old Vic Theatre, and the Opera House management at Buxton, not forgetting of course the British Drama League itself, augurs well for the establishment of a festival almost completely within the principal aims and objects of the Drama League.

"Hamlet" in modern dress is no longer a novelty, but at Buxton, Tyrone Guthrie went all out by giving playgoers an uncut version as well. The result was completely satisfactory, and proved that the period in which "Hamlet" is dressed matters little, the play is far too great.

Pinero's ever-delightful "Trelawny of the Wells" was extremely well cast and produced by Tyrone Guthrie, with a nicely proportioned sense of values in sentiment and emotion, without underestimating the comic possibilities.

Esmé Church's production of "The Rivals" suffered from somewhat unhappy casting. But Stewart Chaney's settings struck just the right note for enabling the style of production to match the period of the piece.

TEWKESBURY FESTIVAL.

It is a lucky thing for Tewkesbury and its beautiful Norman Abbey, that it has in its vicar, the Rev. Edward P. Gough; its organiser, John Moore; and its producer, Frank Napier, men who are imbued with the right spirit and understanding for preserving a perfect understanding between the church, drama and the people.

This year's third festival has attracted some controversy concerning the choice and suitability of James Bridie's "Tobias and the Angel", and "Jonah and the Whale". Everyone has been agreed, however, upon the excellence and ingenuity of Frank Napier's production work.

The property whale and sailing ship in "Jonah and the Whale" were perfect examples of ingenuity and economic craftsmanship, which did not appear out of place with the great West Front of the Abbey as the natural backcloth to a small improvised platform.

The Religious Drama Society held a Conference contemporaneously with the Festival, which attracted distinguished speakers and delegates from all over the country.

PAGEANT OF BIRMINGHAM.

The Pageant, which has formed the major part of Birmingham's festivities by way of celebrating the Centenary of its Charter, proved to be a triumphant success. Staged in a hollow of Aston Park, which is now a suburban public open space, Birmingham's local history was unfolded with pictorial colour, pomp, and scenic splendour. With the towers and turrets of Aston Hall in the background, to form a fitting setting for the visit of Charles I to that very hall, there followed its seige by the Roundheads, and in the last episode the visit of Queen Victoria to Birmingham in 1858, when she opened Aston Park, to the delight of the excited local crowds.

The Battle of Crecy episode proved to be one of the most exciting and popular scenes of the show. In this, Mr. S. C. Kaines-Smith, the author of the scenario, proved himself an expert in heraldry.

The epilogue, devised and arranged by H. Gordon Toy, brought to life a number of local celebrities, who earned National, if not International, notoriety, including Bolton and Watt; David Cox and Burne-Jones (the artists); R. T. Cadbury and Joseph Sturge (the great social and welfare pioneers); Joseph Chamberlain, Sir Rowland Hill (founder of the penny post) and Cardinal Newman.

This show must have proved the most successful of the efforts of Miss Gwen Lally, who with her hypnotic personality is able to inspire and control thousands of performers with a sure touch of showmanship.

PHYLIS PHILIP RODWAY.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

SELBORNE PAGEANT.

Selborne, that fortunate Hampshire village that had Gilbert White to write its Natural History in the eighteenth century, continued its luck in 1938 with a pageant by Mary Kelly that records all the history known of so happy a place, in a perfect natural setting, on a fine day in July. Gilbert White in person, speaking from his cob, showed us three scenes from the history of his beloved village and dismounted to join in the fourth. Thus we saw:

in 1049 Edward the Confessor hunting in the unchanged woods and leaving his quarry, to the disgust of his brothers-in-law, to found Selborne Church;
in 1265 a single combat between the outlaw Adam or Gurdon and the young Prince Edward (afterwards Edward I), whose mother in queenly fashion cheered the victor and succoured the vanquished;
in 1387 an unlucky visitation of William of Wykeham to the Canons of Selborne, when these had forgotten their religious duties at a local May-Day festival;
in 1790 the village *en fête* for a wedding, rudely interrupted by the recall of the 77th Highlanders from Selborne, who marched out with skirling pipes for Southampton and India.

Local charities profited by the performance and spectators from a distance carried away an unforgettable vision of Old England.

READING.

The Reading Repertory Company works on rather unique lines, being founded for the purpose of producing plays of "unusual merit" only, and being run almost wholly on a subscription scheme basis. It has a very large following in Reading and for 5s. 6d. only subscribers receive two free seats to all plays and other concessions. Membership last season rose from 275 to nearly 450 and the plays, "Yellow Sands", "Night Must Fall" and "Pride and Prejudice", were so popular that the runs had to be extended from three to four nights. In spite of this, people were unable to obtain seats.

During the season a mimeographed news-sheet was issued gratis to subscribers and this season is being produced on even better lines. Four issues will appear in printed form and will contain all the latest news of Rep. activities.

The first two plays for this season have been chosen as the result of a questionnaire issued to audiences. They are "The Farmer's Wife" and "A Man's House" and rehearsals on the first play commenced as far back as July. An appeal for 600 subscribers has been launched and there appears to be every prospect that this total will be reached.

Another step forward has been taken by the formation of a permanent orchestra to replace the radiogram used before for incidental music.

The President of the Reading Repertory Company is Sir Cedric Hardwicke, and among the Vice-Presidents is Mr. Emyln Williams, who takes great interest in the Company, and has sent the members many encouraging messages.

C. C.

SINGAPORE Y.M.C.A.

An excellent amateur theatrical production was presented for the discriminating Singapore public at the Victoria Theatre recently, when the Sceneshifters put on a comedy drama by Aurania Rouverol and Emile Littler, "Love Isn't Everything."

The Sceneshifters are that enterprising band of amateur actors who really began the post-slump revival of the Singapore stage in 1933, when they built for themselves the Glade Theatre at Duncan Road and began their career.

Since then they have produced a play only once or twice a year, preferring quality to quantity, and it can fairly be said that each one of their shows has been a great success from all points of view.

"Love Isn't Everything" was no exception. A bright and entertaining play was put over with great success and no one who visited the Theatre during its run could have been disappointed.

One felt that the players were enjoying their job from start to finish, and they did it with right good will which caused the audience to enjoy themselves as well. A crowded house was very appreciative of the whole show and did not hesitate to acclaim the actors.

The Sceneshifters of to-day are a very different band from those who set out lightly five years ago to resuscitate the flagging interest of Singapore audiences in the legitimate stage, but the chief figures behind the scenes are there still and aided by experience are improving every time on the earlier productions.

GUILD THEATRE STUDIO.

The new Guild Theatre Studio for Amateurs opened its first term on Monday, September 26th, with every sign of establishing itself as one of the most interesting movements in the London Amateur Theatre.

Mr. Richard Southern, so well known to British Drama League members, is the new Studio's Technical Adviser. Mr. Southern will also take the courses on Theatre Setting, Scenic Construction and Stage Lighting, and is co-operating in the Direction of the Studio with Mr. Michael Rose, recently Durham Producer for the N.C.S.S., who has had many years' association with the London Amateur Theatre as Actor and Producer. He is to take a course on the Approach to Acting and one on Practical Play Production, and will also be handling the first Guild Theatre Studio production. Mr. Michael MacOwan, the Westminster Theatre producer responsible among many notable successes for the production of "Mourning Becomes Electra", is giving a series of lectures on production; Mr. Robert Speaight, who after playing for four years in "Murder in the Cathedral" in this country and in America will be seen in London in the Autumn in a modern dress production of "Troilus and Cressida", is giving a course on The Theory and Tradition of Acting with special reference to its Technique, Physical and Mental. There will also be separate courses for Advanced and Elementary students on Speech Training and Movement.

Guild Theatre Studio breaks new ground in providing practical courses where students may work with actual materials and equipment, the students of these courses being responsible for the practical work on

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

productions. These courses are Costume Making, Stage Management, Scenic Construction and Stage Lighting, the latter being held in the new Demonstration Theatre of the Strand Electric Company with a full range of modern equipment. There are also Practical Courses on Make-Up to be taken by N. E. B. Wolters, author of "Modern Make-Up for Stage and Screen".

Full particulars may be obtained from Guild Theatre Studio, 3, Roger Street, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Telephone: Chancery 8410.

ESSEX COUNTY COMMITTEE.

Significant performances of Dekker's "Shoemaker's Holiday" are being given at Chelmsford and Hatfield Peverel. The Committee considers its work is mainly to teach, advise and promote, rather than to produce plays, but from time to time, for the benefit of isolated drama-lovers who have little chance of acting, it gathers individuals from various villages in the county and puts on a play. Such were the elements, reinforced by two or three experienced actors, that the Reverend E. J. Burton fused into a company, full of the team-spirit, capable of giving a very happy rendering of a difficult Elizabethan play.

Mr. Burton arranged a scholarly and ingenious acting version of the "Holiday" that should be useful to other companies, and with skill and inspiration produced a remarkable performance. The cast was proud to include such accomplished actors as Mr. J. H. Beaumont and Mr. Laurence Andrews (who kindly gave their services), and the charming effect of the play was due to Mrs. Barralet and Mrs. Janet Taylor, two talented amateur costumiers, who achieved as if by magic—the magic of imagination, knowledge and hard work—an accurate and artistic set of Elizabethan costumes.

OXFORD.

We have received from Oxford a copy of the first number of "Theatre Forum", a well-produced little magazine with amusing illustrations specially concerned with the theatrical movement in Oxford, though other matters are also dealt with. The magazine costs 6d., and may be obtained from Messrs. Frederick Farley and Eric Hobbs at 187, Divinity Road, Oxford.

The Editor of the "Theatre Forum" would be pleased to send a copy to any reader of "Drama" in exchange for a similar magazine issued by any society.

NEW PLAY BY MISS PHOEBE REES.

Mrs. Worthington announces that the next production in her well-known series of Charity Matinees will be "Intervention", a new play by Miss Phoebe Rees. The performance will be given in a West End theatre on November 22nd, in aid of the Princess Beatrice Hospital, and Queen Mary and Princess Alice have graciously promised to be present.

THE STAGE SOCIETY.

This year the Stage Society is celebrating its fortieth anniversary. Since its foundation in 1899 it has produced over 200 plays by English and foreign dramatists.

Unfortunately, new and important plays by English dramatists are hard to come by to-day. The encouragement of new writers has always been the task of the Society, and this year it is addressing itself to it with renewed vigour. It has the support of many prominent writers, actors, producers, and designers, some of whom have recently joined the Council of Management. The Council has before it two problems: to stimulate the writing of new plays of value, and the creation of a keen and critical audience. A subsidiary body to the Stage Society has been formed called the Stage Society Theatre Club, the annual subscription of which is only 5/- (students 2/6), and seats may be purchased for as little as 2/6 (students 1/9). Everyone who has tried his hand at writing a play or desires to see the Society's productions is invited to write to the Secretary, 32, Shaftesbury Avenue, W.1, for a full prospectus.

The first play of the season will be John Langdon-Davies's translation of the peasant play by Federico Garcia Lorca, the Spanish poet, entitled "The Marriage of Blood". It will be presented at the Phoenix Theatre on Sunday, October 30th, under the direction of Michel Saint-Denis. Amongst other plays under consideration, the Council will present a new play about modern China, and it is hoped that the Council's efforts will result in the discovery of at least two new English plays this year.

TOYNBEE HALL.

An unusual opportunity is provided by the School of Drama at Toynbee Hall for amateurs whose interests—to quote from the syllabus—"range from the desire to be informed about the art of the theatre to those who would study its technicalities in detail". The progressive evening classes are designed to cover the art of the theatre in all its aspects, and stage-management, lighting, costume making, property making, etc., are covered by the various courses. The dramatic staff is drawn from the Old Vic and London Theatre Studio, so that expert professional tuition is assured. The School of Drama is not an academy for the professional stage, but the intensive and continuous training which it offers should appeal to all amateurs who take their work seriously. Proficient students will ultimately take their places in the Toynbee Hall Players, a group which will be formed for the purpose of presenting plays in the new theatre, which is equipped with modern lighting. A workshop for the making of scenery and costumes is attached, and is at the disposal of all groups of the School of Drama.

Intending students should apply to the Director, School of Drama, Toynbee Hall, 28, Commercial Street, London, E.1.

A GOOD OFFER.

Mr. Henry Reid, chief producer to the City Repertory Players, as well as to other smaller societies, will be prepared to consider applications for his services as an honorary producer to societies in Central or South East London. Please communicate in the first instance to the Secretary, The British Drama League, 9, Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.

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